



# Louisiana *Validated Practices Initiative*

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## **STANDARDS FOR BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: HOW WE WILL KNOW WHEN WE ARE THERE.**

Validated Practices Committee

Louisiana Department of Education, Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance

Inclusion: The understanding that schooling occurs in a unified system in which:

- (a) diversity is supported, expected, and valued;
- (b) high standards can be reached by all; and
- (c) life goals become a reality through collaboration.

*- Marilyn Friend (2005)*

Members of the Validated Practices Committee have developed this document to assist school professionals in assessing their progress toward creating inclusive schools, a complex but achievable goal. School administrators, teachers, related services personnel, parents, community members, and others should use this information to: (a) identify and celebrate areas of strength; (b) focus attention and action steps on areas needing improvement; and (c) foster discussion about how to continue refining educational services for all students, including those whose needs range from mild to intensive.

This document is divided into eight sections, each one representing a major theme related to creating and sustaining inclusive schools. These themes are summarized as follows:

**Foundations of Inclusive Practices** - This theme encompasses the core concepts and understandings of inclusion that school staff members and other stakeholders must possess.

**Diversity** - This theme addresses cultural competence, that is, the knowledge and skills for welcoming all students to the school learning community.

**Collaboration** - This theme pertains to the quality of the working relationships among school staff members and between school professionals and parents/families and others.

**Service Delivery** - This theme captures the specific arrangements through which students receive their educational services.

**Instructional Practices** - This theme addresses the classroom practices that ensure students can access and progress through the general curriculum.

**Behavior Supports** - This theme encompasses the strategies that promote a positive school climate and safe learning environment.

**Professional Development** - This theme represents an acknowledgment that creating inclusive schools requires a wide variety of ongoing support for school professionals, parents/families, and others.

**Administrative Responsibilities** - This theme speaks to the essential role that school principals and other administrators play in inclusive schooling.



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School professionals in Louisiana have made significant strides in rethinking how to best educate students with disabilities. Far more students with disabilities today spend much of the school day in general education classrooms with their peers, accessing the same curriculum, being held to the same standards, and receiving special education services. However, questions remain. For example, caring professionals may ask the following: Are we making the best decisions for students? Are appropriate supports and services being delivered? Are our schools truly inclusive? The items on the following pages are intended to assist schools as they strive to provide the best education to all of Louisiana's children.

**DIRECTIONS:** For each item across the sections, rate the following characteristics as being:

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place



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**Inclusive schooling begins with core understandings. The knowledge that individuals have about both inclusive schooling and students' abilities directly impacts how those individuals operate in school settings.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. All stakeholders hold high expectations for the success of all students. Abilities are the focus, not disabilities.

1 3 5

2. All stakeholders can articulate what inclusive schooling is, and they are supportive of this approach.

1 3 5

3. The mission statement for the school reflects inclusive practices, and all staff members know and subscribe to that mission statement.

1 3 5

4. All staff members (e.g., teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers, clerks) take responsibility for and feel a sense of ownership for all students.

1 3 5

5. Inclusiveness permeates all dimensions of schooling, including extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

1 3 5

6. Decisions related to inclusive schooling incorporate frequent, timely, and meaningful input from parents and other stakeholders.

1 3 5

7. All stakeholders have an understanding of and demonstrate support for federal and state laws and policies related to educating students with disabilities and other special needs.

1 3 5

8. The school's data indicate that most students receive the majority of their education in the general education setting. Decisions to change this arrangement are made only after careful deliberation and are revisited frequently.

1 3 5

9. School Improvement Plans embrace the needs of all learners with a strong focus on continuous improvement utilizing data-based decision making.





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**Inclusive schooling is a particular application of respect for diversity, and so knowledge, beliefs, and skills related to cultural competence are integral to building inclusive schools.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. Discussions about diversity address at least these dimensions:

- Age
- Gender
- Socioeconomic Status
- Ethnicity
- Geography,
- Culture
- Language
- Exceptionality

1 3 5

2. In any classroom, the composition of the students reflects the diversity of the school (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, exceptionality).

1 3 5

3. The student body reflects the community from which the school draws enrollment (that is, students with disabilities are not clustered into particular schools).

1 3 5

4. Cultural competence is reflected in curriculum, lesson planning, written materials, cultural/historical activities, community involvement, cultural celebrations, and other diversity markers.

1 3 5

5. Interactions between school professionals and parents/family members/community members are respectful, collaborative, and demonstrate cultural competence.

1 3 5

6. Data on performance, behavior, placement, identification, and completion of school illustrate that all student groups receive equitable treatment (that is, disproportionality does not exist).

1 3 5

7. School professionals are aware of the potential for bias that exists in everyone, and they openly and continuously reflect on their own biases and how these may affect their interactions with students and their families.

1 3 5

8. In the classroom, feelings of optimism and hope prevail.







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**The goal of inclusive schooling is met through effective partnerships among school professionals, parents and families, and community members.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. School staff members articulate why collaboration is an important dimension of inclusive schooling and express support for it through their words and actions. The result is that the school culture is characterized by collaboration among all stakeholders.

1 3 5

2. Collaboration has a broad meaning and is truly inclusive of staff members, families, agencies, and other community members (that is, linkages are formed and nurtured).

1 3 5

3. Effective communication among all stakeholders is a priority and characterized by respect and validated understanding. Miscommunication is acknowledged and remedied.

1 3 5

4. Shared problem solving characterizes school structures and procedures (e.g., co-teaching and other instructional teams, committees, school governance structures, prereferral, eligibility).

1 3 5

5. Various teams are used to achieve school goals; these teams are provided the supports necessary to function effectively.

1 3 5

6. School professionals use data as the basis for making decisions. They ensure that all stakeholders have necessary data and participate in the decision making.

1 3 5

7. Different viewpoints are valued and considered as resources for increased learning and growth.

1 3 5

8. Collaboration among students is fostered through peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and other effective instructional practices.







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**A hallmark of inclusive schools is an ongoing effort to find creative and effective ways to ensure that students access and make progress in the general curriculum while receiving the individualized instruction and supports needed to be successful.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. Enrollment and attendance at neighborhood schools is a priority for all students.

1 3 5

2. All students have an identified home base in a general education classroom.

1 3 5

3. Special education is viewed by all stakeholders as a service, not a place.

1 3 5

4. Emphasis is placed on supporting students in general education classrooms.

1 3 5

5. Service delivery options are flexible. How students receive special education services is based on their changing needs, not an inflexible schedule.

1 3 5

6. Decisions about the type, quantity, and intensity of services are directly and deliberately determined by the IEP team.

1 3 5

7. Special education, related services, bilingual/ESL, and other service providers are integral to the school's functioning and report never perceiving themselves as second-class professional citizens.

1 3 5

8. Paraprofessionals' roles and responsibilities in general education classrooms (e.g., instruction and behavior support personnel) are articulated and implemented. These individuals provide valuable support to students with direct supervision of teachers and not in lieu of instruction by teachers.

1 3 5

9. Co-teaching is supported as a service delivery option.

1 3 5

10. Although professionals are primarily responsible for providing services, peer tutors, volunteers, paraprofessionals, and others may participate in supporting all students.

1 3 5

11. Information about students with disabilities is made available to all individuals entitled to that information in order to work effectively with students. Confidentiality is a high priority.

1 3 5

12. Personnel evaluation takes into account the increasing array of approaches through which special education services are provided (e.g., co-teachers may be observed together).

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**The quality of the instruction all students receive is critical. Without effective instruction, learning is likely limited. For students with disabilities, this is particularly true. The use of research-based practices cannot be overemphasized as a means of ensuring that students with disabilities reach their potential.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. Teachers are prepared to teach all students who walk through their doors, focusing on grade-level curriculum while addressing unique student needs.

1 3 5

2. Teachers express that they are committed to accommodating student learning needs, and they demonstrate their commitment daily through their choices of instructional approaches.

1 3 5

3. Teachers discuss instruction at the grade, team, or department level with the goal of shared problem solving to address instructional challenges.

1 3 5

4. Every student in a class participates in some way in every learning activity.

1 3 5

5. Instruction in each classroom is characterized by:

- Student engagement;
- Self-determination and choice;
- Individualization;
- Recognition that instruction is for the purpose of preparing students for post-school options;
- Multiple options for students to acquire, store, and demonstrate learning.

1 3 5

6. Instruction is based on:

- Systematic data collection;
- Principles of universal design for learning (UDL);
- Differentiated instruction.

1 3 5

7. Teachers express and demonstrate through their actions that they are accountable for finding ways to help all students learn.

1 3 5

8. Supplemental aids and services are used to ensure that students access and progress in the general curriculum.

1 3 5

9. Instruction encompasses students' academic needs and is also responsive to their social, emotional, behavioral, and cultural needs.

1 3 5

10. Assessment occurs before, during, and after instruction so that next steps are data driven.



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13      3      5

11. Instructional planning for the general education setting draws on expertise of special educators and others.

13      3      5

12. General and special education teachers collaborate during the preparation of students' IEPs.

13      3      5

13. Although teachers at each school level are aware of the increasing demands of the next level, they focus their efforts on appropriately teaching students at the current level.

13      3      5

14. Research on retention is carefully studied, and retention is not used as a means of addressing instructional problems.

13      3      5

15. A variety of instructional strategies are implemented in the general education classroom.

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Some teachers and others note that they can make instructional accommodations, but that they are not equipped to address the behavior challenges that some students display. Therefore, systems must be in place to ensure that behavior does not prevent full participation in general education activities.

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. Positive behavior support procedures are implemented for all students.

1 3 5

2. The school uses positive behavior supports that include school-wide plans, classroom plans, individual student plans, and intensive interventions for students needing them.

1 3 5

3. Students needing behavior intervention plans based on functional behavior assessment receive them, and all their teachers (i.e., general and special education) have a meaningful role in implementing such plans. Behavior intervention plans (BIPs) are written and implemented consistently. Data are reviewed frequently, with plans adjusted accordingly.

1 3 5

4. Education of students is based on age appropriate instructional practices.

1 3 5

5. All procedures and strategies for addressing student behavior occur within a climate of respect, trust, and optimism.

1 3 5

6. Social skills are taught along with the explicit academic curriculum, and the social dimension of students' functioning is directly addressed as part of their individualized education.

1 3 5

7. Professionals use the appropriate type of reinforcement for each student (for example, verbal, activity, tangible).

1 3 5

8. Schools have written programs and procedures to support and demonstrate ongoing reciprocal communication with families.

1 3 5

9. Parents are partners and active participants in positive behavior support procedures.

1 3 5

10. All staff members can provide examples of how diversity influences student behavior and staff members' own beliefs about student behavior.

1 3 5

11. All staff members express confidence in meeting the behavior needs of their students.



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1 3 5

12. School safety is directly addressed, including taking measures to address bullying and other forms of school violence.

1 3 5

13. School staff members can describe the positive or negative effects that various medications may have on student behavior.

1 3 5

14. Suspensions and expulsions are last-resort strategies implemented at rates significantly below the state average.





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Although some stakeholders seem to know intuitively how to nurture inclusiveness, ongoing professional development is essential. This staff development, which should adhere to the standards established by the National Staff Development Council (NSCD), covers the topics included in this guide, and also addresses the unique needs of parents and families.

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. Staff members are highly qualified.

1 3 5

2. Effective structures for professional development are implemented (e.g., small schools, professional learning communities, coaching).

1 3 5

3. The School Improvement Plan directly addresses professional development related to inclusive outcomes and setting appropriate goals related to this topic.

1 3 5

4. All staff members are expected to engage in continuous professional growth through identification of challenges, goal setting, and relevant staff development.

1 3 5

5. Principles of effective staff development (e.g., tailored to individuals' needs, ongoing, formatted in multiple ways, research-based) are built into programming.

1 3 5

6. Understanding and respecting diversity are central tenets of all professional development.

1 3 5

7. Parent knowledge and skill development is based on expressed parent needs and collaboration in its planning, delivery, and evaluation.

1 3 5

8. Evaluation of effective professional development is linked to change in practice and improvement in student outcomes.





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**Principals and other administrators make the difference in whether a school truly adopts an inclusive approach. Administrative roles are many, but the responsibilities can be grouped into the categories of leadership and management.**

(1) Not in Place

(3) Partially in Place

(5) In Place

1 3 5

1. The principal has an unwavering belief in the value of inclusive schooling and considerable knowledge and skills for moving the concept to practice.

1 3 5

2. The principal is a visible and vocal advocate of inclusive practices. S/he communicates unambiguously to staff members the expectation for all school practices to foster inclusion.

1 3 5

3. The principal encourages staff members to take risks to foster inclusive schooling, supporting them even when dilemmas arise.

1 3 5

4. The principal creates a safe, friendly, and welcoming school climate for students and parents/families as well as staff, one based on collaboration and inclusiveness.

1 3 5

5. The principal feels personally responsible for ensuring that all students succeed and goes to extraordinary lengths to reach difficult-to-teach students.

1 3 5

6. The principal finds strategies to celebrate the varied accomplishments of all students.

1 3 5

7. The principal is aware of and accesses a wide array of resources to support teachers and other staff in creating and sustaining inclusive schooling.

1 3 5

8. The principal views change as a constant and nurtures this understanding among staff members.

1 3 5

9. The principal constantly searches for strategies to ensure teachers provide equal access for all students.

1 3 5

10. The principal views special education as a service, not a place.

1 3 5

11. The principal ensures inclusive practices are aligned with school improvement efforts.

1 3 5

12. The principal ensures an expectation of continuous improvement.



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1 3 5 13.

The principal uses a collaborative approach in creating school schedules that support inclusive practices including:

- Provision of common planning time;
- Effective use of faculty/staff;
- Placement of students within general education environments;
- Provision of student supports and services;
- Allocation of resources where needed.

1 3 5 14.

The principal ensures staff members working with students with disabilities are respectfully invited to offer input on successes, dilemmas, and suggestions for changes.

1 3 5 15.

The principal ensures students' IEPs provide the information necessary for designing services and supports.

1 3 5 16.

The principal honors and fosters teachers seeking assistance in meeting student needs before the needs become overwhelming, but they recognize when referral for individual assessment is appropriate.

1 3 5 17.

The principal is proactive and constructive in facilitating the relationships between staff members and parents/families with the goal of helping students achieve success. S/he facilitates a constructive resolution when disagreements among staff members or staff members and parents/families arise.

1 3 5 18.

The principal ensures inclusive schooling efforts are assessed using multiple instruments and approaches, and the assessment addresses academic outcomes, social/emotional/behavioral outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions.



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